



Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Meeting Minutes

Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Wednesday, August 18, 2021

Indiana State Library, History Reference Room

- Christine Blessinger, Director, Division of Youth Services, Department of Correction
- Dr. Kris Box, Indiana State Health Commissioner, Indiana State Department of Health
- Senator Jean Breaux
- Jay Chaudhary, Director, Division of Mental Health and Addiction
- Bernice Corley, Executive Director, Public Defender Council
- Representative Dale DeVon
- Senator Stacey Donato
- Justin Forkner, Chief Administrative Officer, Indiana Office of Judicial Administration
- Kory George, Chief Probation Officer, Wayne County Probation Department
- John Hammond IV, Office of the Governor
- Zac Jackson, Director, State Budget Agency
- Dr. Katie Jenner, Secretary of Education
- Chris Naylor, Executive Director, Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council
- Todd Rokita, Indiana Attorney General (non-voting member)
- Hon. Loretta Rush, Chief Justice of Indiana
- Dr. Dan Rusyniak, M.D., Secretary, Indiana Family and Social Services Administration
- Terry Stigdon, Director, Indiana Department of Child Services
- Representative Vanessa Summers
- Stephaney Knight, Youth Commission Member
- Dejana Rodriguez, Youth Commission Member

1. Welcome and Introductions

John Hammond called the meeting to order at 10:00 and welcomed all Commission members and guests.

2. Consent Agenda

Action: The consent agenda, including minutes from the June meeting, task force and committee co-chair appointments, and approval of the annual report, was moved by Rep. DeVon, seconded by Terry Stigdon, and approved by a vote of 10-0.

3. Executive Director and Committee Updates

Julie Whitman gave an update on Phase 2 Juvenile Justice Review. A press release went out about the Juvenile Justice work being done and future plans of the Task Force. Julie detailed what actions will come from the Task Force and subcommittee and working group focused primarily on data. The work groups will be developing legislative and policy recommendations for the Juvenile Justice Reform Task Force to consider, and these will be presented to the Commission at its December meeting. Julie provided a Family YES! event update. Julie provided a brief overview of the schedule, purpose, and speakers for Family YES! Julie provided an update on behalf of the Data Sharing and Mapping Committee about the Vulnerable Youth Dashboard. The Committee is currently working on bringing together a group to collect data and work on the project. Julie informed the Commission that the disparities data for the state has now been released.

4. Strategic Priority: Child Trauma & Resilience

a. **Presentation by Amber Becker, Division of Mental Health and Addiction; Childhood Trauma and Resilience Committee**

Measurement of Child Trauma & Adversity: Terminology and Resources

The Committee provided and prepared a document about screening to measure child trauma and adversity. The [Trauma Screening and Surveillance Guide](#) provides resources, terminology, and direction to agencies and departments to consider when addressing childhood trauma and adversity.

Action: Dr. Rusyniak made a motion to approve to adopt the document, and Jay Chaudhary seconded it. The motion was approved 10-0.

5. Strategic Priority: Data Update

a. **Presentation by Alicia Kielmovitch, Indiana Youth Institute**

Data Update Related to Commission Strategic Plan

Presentation can be found on slides 12-31 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Alicia presented accessibility, usage, and quantitative data on trends ranging from 2013-2019 on infant mortality, ACE's (Adverse Childhood Experiences), substantiated child abuse and neglect, mental health provider availability, mental health inaccessibility by youth, early education enrollment, school enrollment, exclusionary discipline, graduation rates, retention rates, juvenile involvement, and juvenile recidivism. Alicia pointed out disparities among race and gender for specific categories such as infant mortality, exclusionary discipline and drop-out rates. Alicia provided insight as to why these disparities exist. The data reflects that there is a systemic issue in some categories that are contributing to disparities. Alicia also discussed the geographical limitations of services in some areas and how it can affect outcomes. Alicia specified how some categories could have been affected by the COVID19 Pandemic however that will be determined over the next couple years as more data becomes available.

Discussion: When discussing mental health, Dr. Jenner asked Alicia to clarify who is considered a mental health provider, and Alicia explained that that was defined by the County Health Rankings and includes professionals with various types of licenses. When discussing early education, John Hammond asked whether we had any information on our rate of increasing enrollment—we do not have that information currently. There was some discussion clarifying the number of three- and four-year-old children who could be enrolled in early learning but aren't. Dr. Jenner noted that the low levels of enrollment for Hispanic

children was interesting. Dr. Dan suggested transportation may be an issue. There was some discussion of areas with no or little access to any childcare, and areas with no access to quality childcare. When discussing racial disparities in school discipline, Terry Stigdon asked whether the category “two or more races” could be broken down into more specific racial groups, but Alicia said that data is not available. Dejana Rodriguez asked whether something could be done in the area of teacher training to improve equity in school discipline. Dr. Jenner noted that some school corporations provide strategic interventions differently than others. She would like to look at the data district-by-district to ensure that the districts with the biggest disparities have the best information. Rep. Devon mentioned legislation that passed two years ago to require trauma education for preservice teachers. Dr. Jenner added that different kinds of strategic interventions could make a difference in discipline, including academic interventions. John Hammond asked whether IDOE provided help statewide or district by district. Dr. Jenner noted that when IDOE offers resources, it is up to the school district to take advantage or not. Some use IDOE resources, and some use other providers. She also mentioned that IDOE is working with Karrah Herring, the state’s Chief Equity, Inclusion, and Opportunity Officer, to ensure that all districts have the information they need to best serve all students. Dejana mentioned a particular training called Interrupting Racism for Children, and asked whether the Commission could propose legislation to require that training for all teachers, so everyone has all the training they need to serve all children. Dr. Jenner noted that the law does have cultural competency requirements for schools, and there are certain professional development training topics required by law as well for all teachers. Rep. Devon noted that legislators try to be careful not to put too many requirements on teachers, and that is why the trauma training legislation focused on preservice teachers in their postsecondary programs. He noted it’s a fine line to walk to recruit good teachers and keep them in the classroom, giving them the tools they need to succeed, without overburdening them. Jay Chaudhary said that the school discipline process itself can be very difficult for families to navigate, especially for low income families. He suggested the possibility of providing navigators as a resource to families. Alicia noted that special education students also have disproportionate rates of exclusionary discipline, and in the future she hopes to analyze data on the intersection of race and disability. John suggested that perhaps the equity committee could look for success stories around the state and bring to the Commission what works well to train educators on these topics. Dr. Jenner noted that schools cannot do this alone and need local partnerships. Rep. Devon asked about the impact of socio-economic level on discipline. Alicia said that data is available and can be analyzed. When discussing juvenile justice and recidivism, Jay Chaudhary noted that a new study had come out that indicated that the use of restorative justice reduces recidivism for youth.

6. Strategic Priority: Equity Inclusion and Cultural Competence

a. **Presentation by Brittany Simmons and Tyler Mason, Indiana Court Services**
Applying the Equity Guide to Youth Justice

Presentation can be found on slides 34-42 of the [meeting PowerPoint](#). Julie gave a brief introduction on the tool that Brittany and Tyler were scheduled to present. The purpose of the tool is to apply [7 question Guide](#) to policies to better understand the impact of the policies on different groups of youth. Brittany and Tyler provided an [Equity Guide Application Example](#) as a breakdown of how the tool can be utilized in the youth justice system. Tyler explained step by step how to use the Framework to apply to policy from an equity lens to reduce the risk of unintended consequences and bias. Brittany reviewed the importance of data collection across the state to begin to track trends in probation in order to focus efforts on those who need it the most. Brittany and Tyler highlighted the difference between intent and impact and how potential harm should be considered when enforcing probation conditions on youth.

Discussion: Dejana commented on the importance of being aware of our roots and history as a state and how the systems came into place that perpetuate racial disparities. John affirmed the importance of her point and the work of the Commission’s equity committee. Dr. Jenner affirmed the importance of the team approach included in the proposed solution presented—with schools and other local partners—and she emphasized the importance of solutions being locally driven. Chris Naylor affirmed the importance of data and improving our data collection, and he noted that the juvenile justice system is focused on providing

youth and families with the resources they need, with all parties focusing on the same goal, including prosecutors, public defenders, judges and probation.

7. Discussion: Future Meeting Topics or other items from Commission Members

Zac Jackson asked about the impact of a lack of a father or father figure in the lives of youth and how to strengthen families in those circumstances. Julie indicated that there is research on that question and we can schedule a presentation on that topic for a future meeting.

Rep. Devon stated that the Commission and most government agencies are reactive and trying to help after problems occur, and he posed the question about what we are doing to be proactive and stop the cycle—how do we strengthen families, help kids in environments that place them at risk.

Dr. Jenner added that solutions are multi-faceted, and that we need to zoom out and look at the full picture.

Dejuna asked “What does a healthy human being need to survive in this world, and do our systems support that?” She talked about intergenerational trauma, and if a child doesn’t have an example of a healthy father figure or mother figure, they are not going to know how to do that. The development of the mind of a child—how do we create safe environments for those children to thrive in, and how do the systems help? She noted how common it is for children to go from the child welfare system to the juvenile justice system. How can we equip all of our professionals to ensure that children can thrive?

John noted that Dejuna’s comments hit on a lot of the Commission’s past and ongoing work and raises good topics for future discussion as well.

8. Next Meeting: October 20, 2021, 10am-12pm

The meeting was adjourned at 11:43am.